



eastern cottontail

Sylvilagus floridanus

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Chordata - vertebrates
Class:	Mammalia
Order:	Lagomorpha
Family:	Leporidae

Features

The eastern cottontail is 14 to 16 inches long. It has a rusty-brown body with a cinnamon-colored patch at the nape of the neck. The belly and throat are white. It has a short, stubby tail with a white underside. The soles of the back feet have thick fur. It has very large ears.

Natural History

The eastern cottontail lives in weeds, briar patches, brush, lawns, shrubs, and around wooded areas. It eats alfalfa, clovers, dandelions, and grasses in the summer. It eats buds, fruits, seeds, and bark of shrubs in the winter. It is a coprophage (eats some of its own solid waste). It has two forms of droppings: brown ones, which have no nutrients; and green ones, which are composed of partially digested food and remain full of nutrients. The green ones may be eaten to allow the cottontail to obtain more nutrients in a short time. It moves by hopping. Mating occurs from February to

September. Eastern cottontails are polygamous and undergo a complex mating ritual. The gestation period takes about one month and females breed again almost immediately after giving birth. Four to six young comprise a litter and a female may produce 25 young per year. Young are placed in a nest of hair, grass, and leaves on or in the ground. The mother comes to the nest only to nurse the young—maybe only two times per day. Young leave the nest in about two weeks. They may start breeding at the age of six months.

Habitats

bottomland forests

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

statewide

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.
Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.